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ABSTRACT

Suggestions are presented to help special education teachers develop effective techniques for supervising paraprofessionals. Practices which can be used to make the supervision process more systematic and effective include: orientation to the classroom, and gradual introduction of duties; paraprofessional skill development; use of detailed lesson plans; scheduling of paraprofessional activities; use of weekly planning conferences; and evaluation of the paraprofessional's contribution to the learning environment. The document includes a sample job description for a paraprofessional, an annual training plan, a skill monitoring checklist, a sample teacher/paraprofessional conference documentation guide, two paraprofessional evaluation forms (one to be completed by the teacher and one by the paraprofessional), and a list of suggested readings. (PB)

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Developed by Project TAP:
A Teacher Assistance Program in the Utilization, Training, and Supervision of Paraprofessionals in Special Education Programs

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Supervision Strategies for Special Educators in Working with Instructional Paraprofessionals

Abstract

Paraprofessionals are being utilized in increasing numbers to extend and support services to students with handicaps. Concomitantly, special education teachers are assuming more responsibility for supervising paraprofessionals; however, many educators have not had training in supervising or monitoring instructional assistants. This manuscript provides suggestions for teachers in developing effective supervision. Materials developed and field-tested by Project TAP as part of preservice and inservice education at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln serve as the source of information.

In special education, one of the paraprofessional's primary roles is the delivery of learning activities directly to students. On the average, paraprofessionals spend 75% of their time engaged in academic tasks with students (Vasa, Steckelberg, & Ulrich-Ronning, 1982). The teacher is directly accountable for meeting the learning needs of the students, and must use the available resources--including the skills and services of the paraprofessional--appropriately. Paraprofessionals need to be trained and supervised carefully in order to insure that the learning needs of the students are being met adequately. Heller & Pickett (1983) postulate that the main focus and purpose of supervising a paraprofessional should be to assist the paraprofessional in improving performance in the instructional setting. This "helping process" should be collaborative, involving "mutually reciprocal interaction between the paraprofessional and supervisor."

Supervision of paraprofessionals is largely accomplished by special education teachers (Vasa, Steckelberg, & Ulrich-Ronning, 1982). Several practices can be used to make the supervision process more systematic and effective:

- orientation to the classroom and gradual introduction of duties;
- paraprofessional skill development;
- use of detailed lesson plans;
- scheduling of paraprofessional activities;
- use of weekly planning conferences; and
- evaluation of the paraprofessional's contribution to the learning environment.

Orientation and Introduction of Duties

A paraprofessional encountering a new setting, needs a general orientation to the position. A general orientation covering such topics as school policies, program goals, emergency procedures, and ethical practices helps the paraprofessional understand the requirements of the new position. A mutual exchange of information between the teacher and paraprofessional during orientation is important. Background information helpful to the teacher includes the paraprofessional's educational level, previous work experiences, experiences with children, attitudes toward the handicapped, and sociocultural background. The teacher should also share similar information with the paraprofessional. Additionally, the teacher should explain his/her teaching philosophy, teaching style, and ways of motivating students. The teacher should make specific plans to insure that the new paraprofessional has had the opportunity to become familiar with the position and its duties.

Clarifying the expectations for the paraprofessional's position is an important step in supervision. A well-written job description provides the paraprofessional with an idea of expected duties, and gives information about supervision and evaluation guidelines. The job descriptions should reflect appropriate state rules and regulations regarding paraprofessionals as well as the district's own policies. Figure 1 provides a sample job description for a paraprofessional and could be used as a guide in the development of appropriate job descriptions.

Figure 1
Sample Job Description for Paraprofessional

Position Title: Special Education Paraprofessional

Position Setting: Elementary Resource Room, Grades 3-6

Qualifications for the Position:

1. Good mental and physical health.
2. Eighteen years of age or older.
3. Meet criteria of required training program.

Duties and Responsibilities:

1. Carry out instructional activities with students as planned and directed by the teacher.
2. Assist teacher in implementing the classroom behavior management program.
3. Carry out specific activities with mainstreamed students as directed by the teacher.
4. Provide objective feedback to teacher on student progress and behavior.
5. Assist in the preparation of and care of instructional materials and equipment.
6. Perform clerical duties as assigned by the teacher, including taking attendance, duplication, grading objective work, recording grades, taking inventory, and ordering supplies.
7. Take part in on-the-job and inservice training activities.

Supervision Guidelines: The resource teacher will supervise the daily work of the paraprofessional, providing a schedule, daily plans, and weekly planning conferences. The paraprofessional will be responsible to the teacher in instructional and support role matters. The paraprofessional will be responsible to the building principal in district policy matters.

Evaluation Guidelines: The paraprofessional will be evaluated by the teacher at least once per quarter on those skills listed on the Monitoring Checklist. The teacher and administrator will evaluate the paraprofessional once per year using the Paraprofessional Evaluation. The results of the evaluation will be used to plan future training.

Before working directly with students, the paraprofessional will need orientation to the specific classroom in which he/she will be working. The teacher supplies information about the structure of the instructional program, classroom management strategies, and materials and equipment available.

The teacher develops a plan for integrating the paraprofessional into the program. A new paraprofessional will need time to observe and get acquainted with students and staff before assuming an instructional duties in the classroom. Responsibilities should be introduced gradually, beginning with more extensive observation and feedback. As the paraprofessional becomes acquainted with the students and with the activities that take place in the classroom, the teacher can rely on less extensive observation and support for instructional tasks.

Paraprofessional Skill Development

The supervising teacher has a responsibility to introduce tasks before assigning them and to insure that the paraprofessional has the necessary knowledge and skills for success. Responsibility for acquiring new skills can be encouraged by active participation of the paraprofessional in identifying their training needs and the planning of appropriate activities to facilitate that training.

An annual training plan (Figure 2) provides a systematic way of focusing the skill development of the paraprofessional. The general and classroom orientation would be provided at the opening of

the school year and/or at the beginning of employment. Other topics could be covered in more formal inservice settings, through on-the-job training, or a combination of the two.

Figure 2
Annual Training Plan

Name _____ Date _____

	Targeted	Date Completed
General Orientation		
Orientation to the building and introduction to other staff members.	_____	_____
Goals of the special education program.	_____	_____
State rules and regulations and local education agency policies regarding paraprofessionals.	_____	_____
Ethical considerations in working with handicapped students.	_____	_____
First aid and emergency procedures.	_____	_____
Classroom Orientation		
Physical arrangement of the room and location of instructional materials, equipment, and supplies.	_____	_____
General content of instructional materials.	_____	_____
Daily routines, schedules, and grouping patterns for students.	_____	_____
Classroom rules, behavior management, and discipline strategies.	_____	_____
Systems of reporting student progress and other record keeping and clerical duties.	_____	_____
Inservice		
Tutoring strategies.	_____	_____
Behavior management.	_____	_____
Observing and recording behavior.	_____	_____
Communication skills.	_____	_____
Record keeping.	_____	_____
Other: _____	_____	_____

Many of the skills the paraprofessional will need, such as those relating in tutoring and behavior management, are most appropriately addressed an on-the-job setting. Often, information that is presented in formal inservice must also be coupled with on-the-job training to be effective. An on-the-job training plan, such as the one in Figure 3, can be used to help organize and document the training activities.

Figure 3

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING PLANNING GUIDE

ASSESSMENT OF PARAPROFESSIONAL NEEDS:

Current Skills (Tutoring, Classroom Management, Organization):

New Assignments/Responsibilities:

Interests:

ANNUAL GOALS:

1.

2.

3.

SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES	CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES	EVALUATION
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
6.		

Using Detailed Lesson Plans

One of the major focuses of paraprofessional training is tutoring. Teachers who use paraprofessionals to deliver instruction have an obligation to prepare the paraprofessional adequately for the task and to supervise the paraprofessional's activities. A well-written lesson plan is the first step in clarifying what the teacher wishes the paraprofessional to do in the tutoring situation. A lesson plan designed for guiding the paraprofessional through an instructional activity contains five components: objective, activity, materials, reinforcement, and evaluation. Describing these elements in the lesson plan enables the paraprofessional to carry out the instruction just as it was designed by the

teacher. Figure 4 contains a sample lesson plan which details information needed by the paraprofessional.

Figure 4
Tutoring Plan: Number Recognition

Objective: When presented 10 flash cards (1-10) one at a time, the student will name each numeral with 90% accuracy.

Activity:

1) Have the student sit opposite of tutor at a desk or table with surface cleared of any objects.

2) Show the student one flash card at a time.

3) a) Say: "What number is this? Record on chart "+" if student responds correctly, "-" if student doesn't respond correctly.

b) If the student does not respond correctly, say: "This is number _____ Trace _____." (Be sure student follows arrow.) As the student traces the number, say the name of the number.

Then repeat 3(a) for that number.

4) Repeat step 3 for each card, mark the response on the graph. Work for 10 minutes.

Reinforcement: After each correct response say: "Good job!", "You're correct!", or "That's right!"

Materials: 3x5 textured flash cards for numbers 1-10 with direction arrows for tracing numbers.

Recording Student Performance:

	Student responses: 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Comments
Percent Correct											

Before implementing a lesson it is necessary that a paraprofessional be given clear and precise directions. During the planning time, the teacher explains the purpose of the lesson to the paraprofessional. Using the lesson plan and materials, the teacher demonstrates each step of the activity. Ways to reinforce the student are then discussed. The lesson plan also includes a system for the paraprofessional to record student responses is included.

The paraprofessional is given opportunities to role play the lesson and to observe the teacher implement a similar lesson plan. The teacher then observes as the paraprofessional implements the lesson. Later they evaluate the session and discuss what should be done differently. This supervised practice allows the teacher and paraprofessional to focus on improvement of the paraprofessional's skills. As the paraprofessional works with the teacher and develops tutoring skills, this process will not require as much detail and time. However, the teacher continues to make periodic observations and suggestions for improvement. The use of a checklist, such as the one presented in Figure 5, during these observations, assists the teacher in making a more objective, focused evaluation. The

information gained from the observation can be used for discussion to identify areas which need improvement. The feedback to the paraprofessional about performance should be given in a constructive, non-threatening manner. It should always be coupled with suggestions for improvement and additional training when necessary.

Figure 5
MONITORING CHECKLIST

Date _____ Activity _____

SKILLS	Well developed	Needs improvement	Comments
1. Prepared for the session.			
2. Establishes rapport with student.			
3. Gives clear instructions.			
4. Uses appropriate questions and cues.			
5. Uses materials effectively.			
6. Keeps lesson focused on objective.			
7. Keeps student on task.			
8. Gives feedback about performance.			
9. Uses reinforcement effectively.			
10. Records student response.			
11. Presents lesson at reasonable pace.			
12. Follows lesson as planned.			

Scheduling

Adequate supervision of the paraprofessional and smooth functioning of a classroom is facilitated by use of a long-range schedule of activities to be performed by both the teacher and the paraprofessional. The amount of detail on such schedules may vary from a simple listing of student names and skill areas to be instructed to a rough outline of activities to be conducted. The supervising special education teacher must remain especially flexible in drawing up such schedules as regular class demands and unplanned school activities frequently encroach upon time spent with students.

Weekly Conferences/Planning Time

A standing daily/weekly conference between the supervising teacher and paraprofessional provides time for scheduling, planning lessons, evaluating the effectiveness of past activities, and solving problems. Following are key elements of a good conference between a teacher and a paraprofessional:

- ✓ Predetermined purpose and content
- ✓ Positive problem solving orientation
- ✓ Pertinent and efficient discussion
- ✓ Free from interruptions and distractions
- ✓ Accessible to instructional materials

✓ Consistent.meeting times

While the topic of each conference will vary, these general topics can be handled well in the weekly conference:

- Individual student programming needs
- Evaluation of student progress.
- Lesson planning.and scheduling
- Modeling instructional strategies.
- Classroom management.and reinforcement techniques.
- On-the-job training.planning
- New materials and equipment.

The sample conference guide in Figure 6 is a tool to assist the teacher in planning for effective conferences, and provides documentation of training.

Figure 6
SAMPLE TEACHER/PARAPROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE DOCUMENTATION GUIDE

Time: _____ Date: ___/___/_____ Site: _____

PREPARATION FOR MEETING

Teacher:

Paraprofessional:

TOPICS/AGENDA

1.

2.

3.

4.

DISCUSSION RECORD

RESOLUTION/ASSIGNMENT

Evaluation of Paraprofessional Performance

Evaluating paraprofessional activities identifies training and support needs and determines how effectively the teacher is supervising the paraprofessional. The emphasis of the evaluation should be on identifying and improving the learning environment rather than on the adequacy of the paraprofessional. The evaluation of paraprofessional in the learning setting can be viewed as twofold:

1. Informal evaluation of use of the paraprofessional by the supervising teacher occurs through monitoring on an ongoing basis throughout the school year.
2. Formal evaluation involves the observations and ratings of administrators and other appropriate personnel in addition to those of supervising teachers which relate to the paraprofessional's performance.

Informal evaluation naturally occurs on a daily basis in situations in which adequate supervision is provided. In fact, in such situations the supervisory and evaluation processes may blend so that they occur simultaneously. The Monitoring Checklist (Figure 5) observations and other more incidental observations made during the normal course of the day can be used areas of strength and those which need improvement. The standing weekly conference between teacher and paraprofessionals is an appropriate time to evaluate the paraprofessional's implementation of instructional strategies, rapport with students, and need to perform other duties. Informal evaluation allows the teacher to adjust supervision strategies to allow the proper amount of support and direction to be provided to the paraprofessional. It also provides information to the teacher concerning the effectiveness of planned learning activities being carried out by the paraprofessionals and assists in making decisions about future work assignments.

In contrast to informal evaluation, a formal evaluation requires much more planning and often involves the use of standardized forms. Components of a formal evaluation process include:

1. Focusing the evaluation activities including defining concerns, establishing criteria of acceptable performance, and developing evaluative instruments.
2. Data gathering through formal observations, use of rating scales, questionnaires, etc.
3. Analysis of results and determination of behaviors to maintain or change.
4. Conferencing with person being evaluated to provide feedback and outline plans/strategies to improve or change behavior.

The formal evaluation process is frequently shared by teachers and administrators (Vasa, Steckelberg, & Ulrich-Ronning, 1982). The most commonly used evaluation technique is observation by the supervisor using standard evaluation forms.

Administrators and supervising teachers often draw on the written job descriptions in defining areas of concern and establishing criteria of acceptable job performance. Items appearing on observation forms and rating scales are designed to match duties and responsibilities outlined in the job description. Again, local needs and expectations determine the specific content of evaluation instruments and specificity of items.

The Paraprofessional Evaluation Form (Figure 7) is a sample rating scale which could be completed by the special education teacher or other supervising personnel. This form provides a more general, comprehensive evaluation. Monitoring Checklist (Figure 5) could also be used while conducting a formal observation of the paraprofessional carrying out an instructional activity.

Evaluation information is shared in a conference with the paraprofessional. Topics of an evaluation conference often include strengths and weaknesses; areas in which improvement might be attempted; strategies for altering behavior; plans for needed inservice; and changes in assigned duties.

Evaluation issues which need to be addressed include:

- What is the criteria for acceptable performance?
- What methods will be used to gather data about performance?
- Who will be responsible for evaluating the paraprofessional?
- How often will evaluation be conducted?
- How will feedback about performance be given?
- What strategies will be used to improve performance?

Figure 7
PARAPROFESSIONAL EVALUATION FORM

Name _____ **Room served** _____
Evaluator _____ **Date** __/__/__

Instructions: Complete the following form on each instructional aide employed in the district. The rating scale of 1 to 5 is employed with 1 being low and 5 being high. make narrative comments where they would be appropriate in evaluating the instructional aide. (NA refers to not applicable.)

	High				**Low**
I. Rapport/Interpersonal Skills					
1. Rapport with children	5	4	3	2	1 NA
2. Communication with supervising teacher	5	4	3	2	1 NA
3. Communication with other staff members	5	4	3	2	1 NA
4. Communication with parents of children	5	4	3	2	1 NA
II. Personal Characteristics					
1. Neatness and appropriateness of dress	5	4	3	2	1 NA
2. Interest and enthusiasm for the job	5	4	3	2	1 NA
3. Self-control in stress situations	5	4	3	2	1 NA
4. Initiative and work habits	5	4	3	2	1 NA
5. Friendliness and cooperativeness	5	4	3	2	1 NA
III. Employment Performance					
1. General assistance to the teacher					
a. Attendance taking, etc.	5	4	3	2	1 NA
b. Record keeping of student progress	5	4	3	2	1 NA
c. General housekeeping of the room	5	4	3	2	1 NA
2. Technical assistance in instruction					
a. Operation of audio-visual equipment	5	4	3	2	1 NA
b. Operation of duplication equipment	5	4	3	2	1 NA
c. Bulletin board assistance	5	4	3	2	1 NA
3. Instructional assistance					
a. Individual tutoring skills	5	4	3	2	1 NA
b. Group supervision	5	4	3	2	1 NA
i. small group (1-5)	5	4	3	2	1 NA
ii. large group (5 or more)	5	4	3	2	1 NA
c. Story telling or reading	5	4	3	2	1 NA
d. Behavior management	5	4	3	2	1 NA
e. Observation reports for the teacher	5	4	3	2	1 NA
IV. General Observations					
1. Carries out all assigned responsibilities	5	4	3	2	1 NA
2. Follows ethical procedures	5	4	3	2	1 NA
3. Takes part in inservice opportunities	5	4	3	2	1 NA
4. Is punctual	5	4	3	2	1 NA
5. Carries out student learning contracts	5	4	3	2	1 NA

Comments:

Figure 8
PARAPROFESSIONAL SELF-RATING EVALUATION FORM

Instructions: The following items have been prepared so that you can indicate how you feel about your performance in relationship to each of ten questions. For each item circle the letter which represents your reaction as to whether you Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), are Not Sure (NS), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD).

1. Do I plan for the activity that I have been assigned?	SA	A	N	D	SD
2. Do I make myself helpful by offering my service to the teacher when there is an obvious need of help?	SA	A	N	D	SD
3. Do I have a plan for getting children into groups?	SA	A	N	D	SD
4. Do I find opportunities for giving children choices, or do I tell them what to do?	SA	A	N	D	SD
5. Do I observe closely the techniques used by the teacher and follow through when I am working with the group?	SA	A	N	D	SD
6. Do I really listen to what children say?	SA	A	N	D	SD
7. Do I accept criticisms and suggestions without becoming emotionally upset?	SA	A	N	D	SD
8. Do I follow directions of the classroom teacher?	SA	A	N	D	SD
9. Do I try to develop a friendly attitude with all of my co-workers?	SA	A	N	D	SD
10. Do I give too much help to children rather than allowing them time to think?	SA	A	N	D	SD
11. Do I refrain from interfering between another teacher and pupil unless called on for assistance?	SA	A	N	D	SD
12. Do I avoid criticism of the children, the teacher, and the school?	SA	A	N	D	SD
13. Do I maintain accurate and complete records of the activities of students with whom I work?	SA	A	N	D	SD
14. Do I have an adequate knowledge of the school rules and policies governing my employment?	SA	A	N	D	SD
15. Do I understand the discipline/student management procedures employed by my supervising teachers?	SA	A	N	D	SD
16. Do I have sufficient knowledge of operating audiovisual equipment and reproduction equipment?	SA	A	N	D	SD
17. Do I know the procedures to follow in a school emergency, such as fire, and first aid?	SA	A	N	D	SD
18. Do I dress in an appropriate manner commensurate with the expectations of the school?	SA	A	N	D	SD
19. Do I use the proper school channels when I have a disagreement with a staff member?	SA	A	N	D	SD
20. Do I feel that I am making a positive contribution to the education of students?	SA	A	N	D	SD

References

Heller. B, & Pickett, A. L. (1983). Effective utilization of paraprofessionals by professionals training manual. Reston, Virginia: Council for Exceptional Children.

Vasa, S. F., Steckelberg, A.L., & Ulrich-Ronning, L. (1982). A state of the art assessment of paraprofessional use in special education in the state of Nebraska. Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska, Barkley Memorial Center.

Additional Resources Related to Supervision of Paraprofessionals

Boomer, L. W. (1980). Special education paraprofessionals: A guide for teachers. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 12* (4), 146-149.

Boomer expends the role of the special educator from "teacher" to "program manager"; one who supervises educational goals and resources. Suggestions on how to interview, train and evaluate paraprofessionals are given.

Brown, J. E., & Truitt, M. R. (1987). *The supervisor's handbook.* Shawnee Mission, The National Press Publications, Inc.

This booklet gives guidelines and techniques to help supervisors meet management responsibilities more effectively. It deals with such topics as: developing work plans,;motivating , training, and evaluating workers,; handling conflicts; delegating responsibilities; and communicating effectively.

Clough, D. B., & Clough, B. M. (1978). *Utilizing teacher aides in the classroom.* Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

This textbook is designed to help the teacher utilize paraprofessionals in the classroom. Its contents include: the teacher and the aide; working with the teacher aide; teacher aide utilization; individualizing instruction; reading instruction; multimedia responsibilities; the teacher aide outside the classroom; the volunteer aide; and, evaluating your teacher aide.

Fimian, M. J., Fafard, M. B., & Howell, K. W. (1984). *A teacher's guide to human resources in special education: Paraprofessionals, volunteers, and peer tutors.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc.

This resource book focuses on both necessary background information of human resource workers and the recruitment, selection, assignment, orientation, and training procedures necessary for implementing a paraprofessional, volunteer, or peer tutoring program. The major thrust is to focus upon the instructional role of these human resource workers within the classroom.

McKenzie, R. G., & Houk, C. S. (1986). Use of paraprofessionals in the resource room. *Exceptional Children, 53* (1), 41-45.

The authors report the results of a study which addresses three questions: 1) To what extent are paraprofessionals assigned tasks which are highly characteristics of special education instruction? 2) What changes in the use of the paraprofessional, if any, are desires by resource teachers? and 3) Do resource teachers who use paraprofessionals perceive themselves as having sufficient input into the aide selection and development process? Results indicate that resource teachers favor expanding paraprofessionals' skills to enable them to conduct more specialized and complex tasks. The development of preservice training models for paraprofessionals is recommended.

Moore, M. (1974). Training professionals to work with paraprofessionals. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 53* (4), 308-312.

Five tasks that teachers use when supervising paraprofessionals are described and outlined. The qualities of a paraprofessional trainer and workshop suggestions are also included.

Pickett, A. L. (1986). *A training program to prepare teachers to supervise and work more effectively with paraprofessional personnel.* New York: Center for Advanced Study in Education, City University of New York. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 247 135)

This training program is intended to help administrators and staff developers prepare teachers of special needs students to work more effectively with paraprofessionals. Specific areas addressed include: directing and monitoring their activities, assessing their contributions to the instructional process, and using systematic procedures to improve their skills and productivity.

Vasa, S. F., Steckelberg, A. L. & Hoffman, P. (1986). *Resource guide for the development of policies and practices in the use of paraprofessionals in special education.* Lincoln: Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

This booklet includes the following sections: 1) recruitment, selection, and hiring policies of paraprofessionals; 2) assignment of paraprofessionals duties and responsibilities; 3) training for paraprofessionals and teachers; and 4) supervision and evaluation of paraprofessionals. Four appendices include examples and forms of teacher aide applications, job descriptions, self-rating evaluation forms, and observation checklists.

Vasa, S. F., Steckelberg, A. L. & Ulrich-Ronning, L. (1983). *Guide for effective utilization of paraprofessionals in special education.* Lincoln: Department of Special Education and Communication Disorders, University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

This position paper provides guidelines for establishing and operating paraprofessional programs in special education. Topics and issues covered include legal and ethical issues in utilizing special education paraprofessionals, the respective professional and paraprofessional roles, supervision of paraprofessionals,a nd evaluation of paraprofessionals and paraprofessional programs.